Soldiers’ Lives in the Civil War

[](http://www.ohiohistorycentral.org/image.php?rec=463&img=1065)

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Introduction

[](http://www.archives.gov/research/civil-war/photos/)

As the Civil War breaks out across the United States, Thousands of Americans rushed to join the Union and Confederate Armies.   
They drilled, marched, fought and died hundreds of miles away from home and family

As the war dragged on, both the Union and the Confederacy began drafting young men to be come soldiers.

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The Task

[](http://www.old-picture.com/civil-war/Soldier-Reading-Letter.htm)

You’ve enlisted in the army! But soldier life isn’t as exciting as you thought it would be. You’ve experienced a few battles and managed to avoid serious injury. You spend most of your time marching, drilling and setting up and taking down your campsites. You need to find a way to have fun, so you decide to write a letter to your family back home telling them about your new life as a soldier.

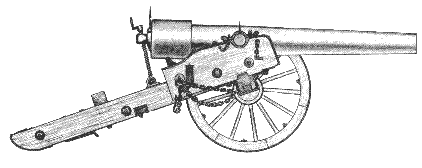
Using the sources provided, you will research what the life of a soldier was like. Using this knowledge, you will then write a letter to a family member or friend back home. You will need to include enough information about your daily life to paint a convincing picture for your audience back home. You will also want to tell them about one of the major battles you have been a part of. Your final letter should be two pages long: you should talk about your daily life in one page, and about the battle you’ve experienced in another page.

The Process- Daily Life

[](http://www.wisegorilla.com/images/civilwar/3johnny.jpg)

* First you should read some examples of letters written by Civil War soldiers to get an idea of what they were like. You can find some examples [here](http://www.mnhs.org/library/Christie/intropage.html). Consider what kind of language they use, and what they talk about. Complete a NARA worksheet for this activity.
* Next you will want to decide who you are. Are you a Union or Confederate soldier? Based on what we have already learned about the Civil War and Kentucky, you know that many families split their allegiance. You need to decide where you are from and how you are. You can find a map of the U.S. during the Civil War [here](http://www.culturalresources.com/MP_Century32.html) and some information about the ages of the soldiers [here](http://www.civilwarhome.com/boysinwar.htm). You need to also include [what year it is](http://www.civilwarhome.com/timeline.htm) and the season.
* There are a great many sources online about the Civil War for you to investigate. You can start by looking at this [essay](http://www.nps.gov/archive/gett/soldierlife/cwarmy.htm) about soldiers’ lives during the Civil War.
* You can also explore this [website](http://www.civilwarhome.com/) for more information about daily life. Remember you do not have to read every article, but here are many great articles that provide great details for you to include in your letters. A few that you might want to make a point to check out are “Civil War Potpourri”, “Letters About the War”, “Civil War Medicine” and “The Civil War Armies”.
* You also need to look at pictures of the Civil War. You can find pictures [here.](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/cwphtml/cwarsubjindex1.html) There are pictures of soldiers and battlefields. What do soldiers’ uniforms look like? What are some details you can see that you can write about? Use the NARA worksheet to complete this step.
* You will also listen to some of the [music](http://pdmusic.org/civilwar2.html) of the Civil War. Consider what the songs were about, what did they sound like and why might these songs have been popular among soldiers. Use a NARA worksheet to complete this step in the process also.

The Process- Battles

[](http://www.wisegorilla.com/images/civilwar/parrott.gif)

* Now that you know a bit more about what daily life was like for a soldier, you can start investigating some of the battles you might have participated in. Pick one of the following battles to research. (Remember what year you are writing from and don’t pick a battle that hasn’t happened yet.) You will use a NARA worksheet to analyze the battle you choose.
  + [Battle of Fort Sumter](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?scsmbib:10:./temp/~ammem_8mf9::@@@mdb=mcc,gottscho,detr,nfor,wpa,aap,cwar,bbpix,cowellbib,calbkbib,consrvbib,bdsbib,dag,fsaall,gmd,pan,vv,presp,varstg,suffrg,nawbib,horyd,wtc,toddbib,mgw,ncr,ngp,musdibib,hlaw,papr,lhbu) (April 12-14, 1861)
  + [First Battle of Bull Run](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?mtaft:6:./temp/~ammem_sZKD::@@@mdb=mcc,gottscho,detr,nfor,wpa,aap,cwar,bbpix,cowellbib,calbkbib,consrvbib,bdsbib,dag,fsaall,gmd,pan,vv,presp,varstg,suffrg,nawbib,horyd,wtc,toddbib,mgw,ncr,ngp,musdibib,hlaw,papr,lhbumbi) (July 21, 1861)
  + [Battle of Antietam](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/P?mal:12:./temp/~ammem_LExY::@@@mdb=mcc,gottscho,detr,nfor,wpa,aap,cwar,bbpix,cowellbib,calbkbib,consrvbib,bdsbib,dag,fsaall,gmd,pan,vv,presp,varstg,suffrg,nawbib,horyd,wtc,toddbib,mgw,ncr,ngp,musdibib,hlaw,papr,lhbumbib) and [here](http://aotw.org/) (September 17 1862)
  + [Battle of Gettysburg](http://www.army.mil/gettysburg/flash.html) and [here](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?mcc:3:./temp/~ammem_s6qN::@@@mdb=mcc,gottscho,detr,nfor,wpa,aap,cwar,bbpix,cowellbib,calbkbib,consrvbib,bdsbib,dag,fsaall,gmd,pan,vv,presp,varstg,suffrg,nawbib,horyd,wtc,toddbib,mgw,ncr,ngp,musdibib,hlaw,papr,lhbumbib,) (July 1-3, 1863)
    - Some more detail about Gettysburg can be found [here](http://www.brotherswar.com/Gettysburg-2k.htm).
  + [Battle of Chickamauga](http://www.chickamauga-1863.com/) (September 19, 1863)
  + [Battle of Chattanooga](http://ngeorgia.com/history/chat.html) and [here](http://ngeorgia.com/history/chat.html) (November 23-25, 1863)
  + [Battle of Pilot Knob](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/P?mal:1:./temp/~ammem_i5Zy::@@@mdb=mcc,gottscho,detr,nfor,wpa,aap,cwar,bbpix,cowellbib,calbkbib,consrvbib,bdsbib,dag,fsaall,gmd,pan,vv,presp,varstg,suffrg,nawbib,horyd,wtc,toddbib,mgw,ncr,ngp,musdibib,hlaw,papr,lhbumbib,) and [here](http://freepages.military.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~caulleyfamilyinfo/HISTORY.HTML) (September 22, 1864)
  + [Sherman’s March to the Sea](http://georgiainfo.galileo.usg.edu/marchsea.htm) and [here](http://www.history.com/civilwar/shermansmarch/) (November 16-December 21, 1864)
* You can also look at some of the previous sites for information. The Home of the Civil War has [official records for each battle](http://www.civilwarhome.com/records.htm) as well as some descriptions; you can search the Selected Civil War Photographs for pictures of your battle site.
* Some information to consider when researching your battle: where did it happen? How many soldiers were on each side? What time of the year was it? How many people died and how many people were wounded? Which side won? What happened as a result of the battle? What types of weapons were used? (The Battle of Gettysburg website has a good section on weaponry.) Who was in command? What was the landscape like?

Process- Letter Writing

[](http://www.wisegorilla.com/images/civilwar/Battle_of_Gettysburg.jpg)

* Now that you are an expert on daily life and on the battle you participated in, you are prepared to write a letter back home. First think about to whom you are writing. Your parents? Your siblings? Your wife? A sweetheart? Your best friend? The content of your letter will change depending on who your audience is.
* Your final letter should be two pages: one page should explain your daily life and the other page should be about the battle you participated in.
* You should include enough detail about daily life and your battle to paint a convincing picture to your reader back home, but your letter should not simply list facts. Your letter should tell a story about the events as if you were actually experiencing them. What emotions were you feeling? What do you hope for? What do you wish to change as a result of what is going on?

Evaluation

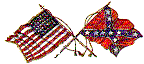
|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| CATEGORY | 4 (Excellent) | 3 (Good) | 2 (Fair) | 1 (Poor) |
| Content Accuracy | The letter contains at least 15 accurate facts about the topic. | The letter contains 10-14 accurate facts about the topic | The letter contains 5-9 accurate facts about the topic. | The letter contains less than 5 accurate facts about the topic. |
| Capitalization and Punctuation | Writer makes no errors in capitalization and punctuation | Write makes 1-2 errors in capitalization and punctuation | Write makes 3-4 errors in capitalization and punctuation | Write makes more than 4 errors in capitalization and punctuation |
| Creativity | Writer tells an interesting story, using creative imagery, and convincing detail. The letter is clearly written from the perspective of a Civil War Soldier. | Writer tells an interesting story, but some details are missing. With a few exceptions, the writer stays in character. | There are significant flaws in the letter’s story. The writer attempts to create a character, but there are often inconsistencies. | Writer makes little to no effort to write a story or create a character. There are few identifying details and the letter consists of mostly facts. |
| Sources | Writer clearly uses multiple sources of many types, including articles, pictures, maps, and presentations. Writer completes a NARA sheet for each indicated activity. Writer interprets sources correctly. | Writer uses many sources but mostly from one type or there are few misinterpretations.  (verified by the NARA worksheets) | Writer uses few sources from one or two different sites, or the writer often misinterprets and misapplies information.  (verified by the NARA worksheets) | Writer uses no sources, or there are significant misinterpretations of information.  (verified by the NARA worksheets) |

Conclusion

[On April 9, 1865, General Robert E. Lee (right) surrendered to General Ulysses S. Grant at …
[Credits : The Granger Collection, New York]](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic-art/30727/86756/On-April-9-1865-General-Robert-E-Lee-surrendered-to)

The Civil war was a turning point in United States history. Not only did it profoundly impact the lives of the people who experienced it, but it also changed the course of the development of the United States’ culture and institutions. By exploring the lives of soldiers you’ve learned how important and life-changing these four years in history have been.

Credits and Resources

[](http://www.wisegorilla.com/images/civilwar/flags.gif)

Title page picture from [American Civil War](http://www.ohiohistorycentral.org/image.php?rec=463&img=1065)

Intro page picture from [Pictures of the Civil War](http://www.archives.gov/research/civil-war/photos/)

Task page picture from [Old Picture](http://www.old-picture.com/civil-war/Soldier-Reading-Letter.htm)

Credit and Resource page clipart and all clipart from [Wise Gorilla](http://www.wisegorilla.com/images/civilwar/flags.gif)

[Map of US](http://www.culturalresources.com/MP_Century32.html)

[Christie family letters](http://www.mnhs.org/library/Christie/intropage.html)

[Home of the American Civil War](http://www.civilwarhome.com/)

[What was Life as a Soldier like in 1863?](http://www.nps.gov/archive/gett/soldierlife/cwarmy.htm)

[Selected Civil War Photographs, 1861-1865](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/cwphtml/cwarsubjindex1.html)

[Music of the Civil War](http://pdmusic.org/civilwar2.html)

Conclusion page photo from [Britannica Online](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic-art/30727/86756/On-April-9-1865-General-Robert-E-Lee-surrendered-to)